

March 21, 2010

Media Contact: Rebecca Dreilinger (202) 225-8203

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

(Washington, DC) Today, at a rally on the National Mall in Washington D.C., Congressman Luis V. Gutierrez (D-IL) chair of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Immigration Taskforce, addressed a crowd of approximately 100,000 marchers who gathered from across the nation to demonstrate the real and urgent need for comprehensive immigration reform.

His remarks are as follows:

I want to thank you. All of you. It looks like a few people decided to come to Washington today. Now – we need a few people in that building to listen to the immigrants of America.

Well, I know how to be heard. We raise our voices. I promise you —if today we will raise our voices in hope— then soon we will raise our voices in victory. Because our day is coming. Together, we will turn today's hope into tomorrow's victory.

We stand here at the front door of American history. Tens of thousands of immigrants are filling America's front yard. The very same space where the overlooked and the dispossessed have always traveled to seek redress for their claims.

What history will we make at this spot today?

At one end of America's front yard —behind all of you— sits Abraham Lincoln. The great emancipator. In 1863, with one signature, he turned hope into victory for millions of African-American slaves. Injustice and cruelty were attacked —and defeated— by a courageous man with this weapon — a pen.

Because when Abraham Lincoln moved his pen across the Emancipation Proclamation, he moved African-Americans out of the desperate shadows of slavery and into the bright sunlight of freedom.

And 100 years later, when America had broken its promise to them, hundreds of thousands of people again came to America's front yard — just as we do today— to demand true freedom.

On that day, another great American, Martin Luther King, had a simple message: Justice cannot wait. On this day, in 1963, when Dr. King said justice cannot wait, he was right.

And I say it to you today. Justice for immigrants cannot wait. It cannot be delayed because of the fears of politicians.

Today, we are flipping over a new page on the calendar. Yesterday's page was one of "fear," and "finger-pointing" and "waiting." We are turning to a new day that says "justice."

And you know what else the new immigrant calendar says?

It says, "now."

Justice. Now.

Let me hear you say those words.

Justice. Now. Justicia. Ahora.

I like those words. We will repeat them again and again until we turn our hope into victory, and we are heard.

After Dr. King said “justice now,” in that building, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act, and President Lyndon Johnson made equality *real* for African-Americans.

How did he do it? With a pen. A simple pen.

Abraham Lincoln had a pen. Lyndon Johnson had a pen. My friends, Barack Obama has a pen. President Obama’s pen can turn our hope into victory. We want Barack Obama to use his pen. We want him to use it now. Because we can’t wait any longer. Our friends, our families and neighbors have waited. For too long. We have waited for Democrats to lead. We have waited for Republicans to lead.

And while we wait, we are blamed. If America has a problem it can't solve, our enemies blame immigrants.

Lost your job? Blame immigrants. Costly health care? It’s those immigrants.

But you know what? I say the blame game is over. For today, we’ve come to the front door of American history, to say that the wait is over. The time is now. We are ready to turn hope into victory!

So today, I want to leave you with this message: we've been patient long enough. We've listened quietly, we've asked politely. We've turned the other cheek so many times our heads are spinning. Here—in this place where Americans facing injustice travel to have justice

delivered— we need to present our demands.

What is it we want? To me, it's simple.

It's time to let immigrants come out of the shadows into the light, and for America to embrace them and protect them.

The sun is shining on our future today. Today, I'll tell you what I want. I want the light of justice to bring its glow to every immigrant in every city and town in our nation.

What do I want?

I want the sunlight of fairness to drive away the darkness and shadows that immigrants have been forced to live and hide in.

What do I want?

I want to end the deep and real fear that children of immigrants feel every day of becoming orphans because their parent might be deported. I want to end parents vanishing and disappearing in the middle of the night.

What do I want?

I want to stop the pain of women working the fields until their hands are calloused and bloody. I want them protected from bosses who threaten them. I want those who exploit immigrant women to be jailed for their crimes.

What do I want?

I want the day laborers across the nation to know that for eight hours of hard work they will receive eight hours of fair pay.

What do I want?

I want safe borders where greedy and violent smugglers can't get away with treating human beings like cattle and infesting our communities with drugs.

What do I want? It's simple.

I want millions of people, who risked it all to come to a new country to build better lives—to build a better America *for all of us*— to reach their dreams of becoming American citizens.

What do I want? I will tell you what I want. I want comprehensive immigration reform. I want justice and I want it now.

I see the light. I see the light of a brighter day coming.

I see the light of justice shining on immigrant soldiers from Mexico and the Philippines and Poland and Panama and Haiti and Ethiopia who have risked and lost their lives so that all Americans can live freer and safer.

I see the light of justice illuminating the future of young children who pray every night that they won't lose their mommy because she crossed a border when they were just babies to give them a better life.

And I see the light of justice shining on this Capitol where comprehensive immigration reform will be passed and the White House where Barack Obama will take his pen and finally sign that bill into law.

Can you see it? I see it and I feel its warmth.

For immigrants, it has been a long, cold season. But spring is in the air. That doesn't mean we can stop fighting and pushing. We have to keep marching and praying and working. But we are closer to turning hope into victory.

So today, I am optimistic but determined. The President must keep his word. I am gratified that we have traveled so far, but I know the last few miles are the hardest. But we're closer.

I know that we have had many cold nights. After decades of midnights, it has often felt like morning was a lifetime away. But we're beginning to see the light of dawn.

I want it to shine on every immigrant. On the woman on her hands and knees all day – digging onions in Salinas – until her knees are almost gone. On the man washing dishes – thousands of dishes in El Paso – until he can barely feel his hands anymore. On the woman in a sweatshop – in the basement, with no union, no rights in New York City – for a few dollars to support her kids.

And I want it to shine on Barack Obama — our President and our leader. I want the light of justice to guide his actions and make him our ally and our protector. And I want it to guide his pen, so that he can keep his promise to our nation of immigrants.

It's time to step out of the shadows and for the sun to shine. To shine finally; to shine warmly and brightly; to shine now and forever on America's immigrants. Together, we are going to make that sun come up.

Thank you and si se puede.

###